

Message Text

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ORIGIN EUR-12

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DRAFTED BY EUR/P:MWJERABEK:TL

APPROVED BY EUR:JAARMITAGE

EUR/EE:CWSCHMIDT

C - MR. MONTGOMERY

S/S - MR. BRIDGES

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O 221733Z JUL 76

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE IMMEDIATE

INFO AMCONSUL ZAGREB IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, CASC, YO (TOTH, LASZLO)

SUBJECT: TOTH CASE: DEPARTMENT'S PRESS GUIDANCE

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF CONTINGENCY PRESS GUIDANCE PREPARED FOR USE, ON IF ASKED BASIS, BY DEPARTMENT'S PRESS SPOKESMAN FOR REGULAR NOON BRIEFING ON JULY 21. SINCE ANNOUNCEMENT BY GOY OF PARDON OF TOTH, DEPARTMENT HAS RECEIVED INQUIRIES ONLY FROM COLORADO PRESS.

BEGIN TEXT: Q: CAN YOU CONFIRM THE REPORT THAT LASZLO TOTH, THE U.S. CITIZEN IMPRISONED IN YUGOSLAVIA, IS TO BE FREED AND ALLOWED TO RETURN TO THE U.S. ON JULY 23?

A: OUR EMBASSY IN BELGRADE HAS BEEN INFORMED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF YUGOSLAVIA THAT MR. TOTH IS TO BE RELEASED ON FRIDAY, JULY 23, AND WILL BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES.

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Q: WHEN DID THE YUGOSLAVS INFORM US THAT TOTH WOULD BE RELEASED?

A: WE WERE INFORMED OF THE DATE OF RELEASE ON JULY 20. WE HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY INFORMED THAT HE HAD BEEN PARDONED AND WOULD BE RELEASED, BUT NO DATE HAD BEEN GIVEN.

---Q: WHEN WAS TOTH ARRESTED? DID WE EVER HAVE ACCESS TO HIM?

---A: MR. TOTH, AN AMERICAN CITIZEN BORN IN YUGOSLAVIA, WAS ARRESTED ON AUGUST 6 OF LAST YEAR DURING A VISIT THERE. WE WERE NEVER FULLY INFORMED OF THE CHARGES AGAINST HIM BUT, ALLEGEDLY, HE HAD OBTAINED PICTURES OF A SUGAR REFINING FACTORY WHERE HE HAD PREVIOUSLY WORKED. IN NOVEMBER HE WAS SENTENCED TO SEVEN YEARS IN PRISON.

--- WE REPEATEDLY SOUGHT CONSULAR ACCESS TO HIM, BUT THIS WAS ALWAYS DENIED ON THE GROUNDS THAT HE WAS A YUGOSLAV CITIZEN.

---Q: DID THIS CASE RESULT IN "CHILLY RELATIONS" WITH YUGOSLAVIA?

---A: WE HAVE A SOUND BASIS FOR MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONS WITH YUGOSLAVIA. THIS CASE HAS, HOWEVER, CAUSED GREAT CONCERN BECAUSE IT INVOLVES THE WELFARE AND TREATMENT OF AN AMERICAN CITIZEN. OUR CONCERN IS HEIGHTENED WHEN WE ARE PREVENTED FROM FULFILLING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE PROTECTION AND ASSURANCE OF THE RIGHTS OF AN AMERICAN CITIZEN. WE HAVE MADE THIS CASE A MAJOR ISSUE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP AND WE BELIEVE THAT THE YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT NOW BETTER UNDERSTANDS OUR POSITION ON SUCH MATTERS AND WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT SUCH CASES WILL NOT RECUR IN THE FUTURE. IN ANY CASE THE YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT CAN BE UNDER NO ILLUSION THAT SUCH CASES ADVERSELY AFFECT OUR RELATIONS AND ARE BOUND TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

---Q: IS IT TRUE THAT THE YUGOSLAVS TRIED TO USE THIS CASE AS A LEVER IN OBTAINING OUR COOPERATION IN STEMMING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ACTIVITIES OF PERSONS IN THE UNITED STATES OPPOSING THE YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT, AND PUNISHING THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR BOMBINGS?

---A: THIS MATTER WAS NEVER RAISED IN CONNECTION WITH THE TOTH CASE. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THIS WAS AN ELEMENT IN THIS CASE. IF ASKED: WE ARE CONTINUING OUR EFFORTS TO APPREHEND AND PUNISH THE PERPETRATORS OF TERRORIST CRIMES.

2. NO QUESTIONS WERE ASKED AT THE NOON BRIEFING JULY 21. ROBINSON

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